

President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters

Following is a transcript of President Reagan's news conference in Washington last night, as recorded by The New York Times:

OPENING STATEMENT

Good evening, I have a statement.

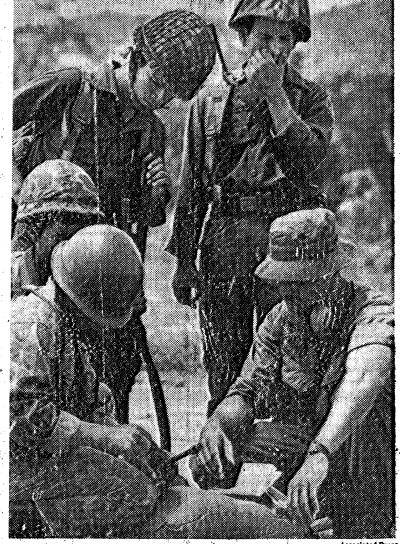
Nearly a year ago tonight, I told the American people that we were making headway against the crisis we inherited. Double-digit inflation, record interest rates and soaring taxes were all coming down.

Well, tonight we can be pleased that our economy is strong and getting stronger. We still have a long way to go, but good news on personal income, real earnings, factory orders, industrial production, housing starts, auto and retail sales are solid signs of hope.

And I have one other important piece of good news. I'm pleased to announce tonight that we are reviving upward our projection of this year's economic growth from 4.7 to 5.3 percent. America's economy is beginning to sparkle.

Sustaining strong growth and keeping inflation and interest rates down require bipartisan cooperation from the Congress. We must understand that disciplined spending and tax increases threaten the recovery.

By trying to increase taxes permanently with their tax cap, liberals in the Congress have renounced John F. Kennedy's criteria for growth and opportunity — meaningful tax-rate reductions for every working American. Their tax cap can't not and will not become law. Because fairness is not slapping tax increases on 2.4 million



Associated Press

A U.S. military adviser talking with Honduran troops Monday at training camp in Honduras, which is being readied for training of Salvadoran soldiers. President Reagan said at news conference that "there's a great lack of information on the part of the people" on U.S. policy in Central America.

was in our possession. No one that we've talked to said that they saw these papers at one time or other. None of them say they ever saw that book that the strategy book.

Q. Mr. President, what was in the position of former campaign officials who now work in this Administration was over 500 pages of various materials, including some that were clearly strategic. Some that gave very specific information. One memo came from some Carter staff members who were brainstorming about the debate.

Q. And all that these countries want from us is this economic help and the military help we're giving them. You know it's a funny thing that there's 1,500 Cubans training in Nicaragua, and there's 55 Americans in El Salvador, and all everyone seems to think is a six is six.

Q. Mr. President, you say though that you'll never say never. You're not giving a pledge to the American people, then, that you will not send combat troops in, is that right?

Q. Sir, if I may? Does it matter if it was not intended whether it was sensitive or not?

Q. Is it stolen if someone hands it to you — if those disgruntled individuals hands to another counterpart in a campaign organization. We don't know how it was obtained.

Q. Sir, you've been asked for a while, what is your answer to that?

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Q. Well, my answer is that it probably wasn't too much different from the rest of the subject matter we've been talking about. It was stolen — and they were classified and it was taken from the law. Now I want the Justice Department to find out if anybody did anything that broke the law.

Q. Budget compromise. Q. Your opening statement obviously reflected concern about Congress going in the wrong direction on spending, on taxes, and although you didn't say so I imagine you're also concerned about the level of defense appropriations. My question, sir, is do you see this coming as the year progresses to a conclusion, or do you rather see yourself sitting down with the leaders of Congress and come to some kind of compromise on these key issues?

Q. A. Wait a minute now, maybe I lost track a little. I was trying to switch gears from the subject we've just been on. At the beginning there you were talking about —

Q. I'm talking about the issues in the budget that you raised in your opening statement. You raised two of them, the Democrats' propensity to raise taxes and the high spending and, I added, gratuitously perhaps, the defense issue which you've expressed yourself previously. Talking about these three issues, do you see a confrontation down the road with Congress, or do you see some kind of accommodation and compromise?

Q. Well, the only confrontation would be if they succeed in passing appropriation bills that bust the budget, that are going to add to the deficit and I would have the necessity of vetoing them. But I think we still have a coalition in Congress that feels as we do that domestic spending should be reduced and not increased as it was in the budget resolution. And I think that this is vital. This is the course that we've been on.

Q. Now a third leg there of defense. I think some of you have been not quite accurate in your describing when you say that I wanted 10 and they wanted 8 and I wouldn't compromise. We originally asked for 11 1/2 and then found out ourselves with the reduction of inflation and all in reflecting that we could reduce that to 10. But then we volunteered to meet them halfway and come down to 7 1/2 and they are the ones who refused.

Q. So they have put in flatly without any compromise what they wanted. When we had offered 7 1/2 — and you all of you, or many of you, I should say, insist on saying that the difference was that we wanted 10. We had come down to 7 1/2.

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Issue of Troops

Q. Mr. President, you have said that you are not going to send any combat troops into Central America. But at the same time, you have said that El Salvador and the rest of the region is of our vital national security and of crucial importance to our country. Isn't there, therefore, an inconsistency in those two statements? If you think it is that much of an importance to our country, why do you say you will never send combat troops in?

A. Well, Presidents never say never. I said that we have no plans to send combat troops, nor are they needed or wanted. President Magana here said, no, that he would not ask for them, he doesn't want them. And I don't think the other countries do. I think they want to create their own democracies and continue on the path they're on.

But they do, frankly, need our help in two areas. They need us to help them with training, to provide arms and munitions so that they can defend themselves while they're instituting these democratic programs. And they need our economic help.

And so far, our help has been three-fold. Three-fourths of our help has been in the area of economic relief, and only one-fourth military.

Q. Now, if you're going to help them to whittle this down to where it's a pittance — they don't say, "No, we won't give anything; give you a few dollars here and a few dollars there." In my opinion, what they're doing is choosing between instant death and letting their country bleed to death. And then they want to be able to blame somebody else, because they passed a nickel instead of a dollar.

Q. And all that these countries want from us is this economic help and the military help we're giving them. You know it's a funny thing that there's 1,500 Cubans training in Nicaragua, and there's 55 Americans in El Salvador, and all everyone seems to think is a six is six.

Papers Investigation

Q. Mr. President, to get back to the case of the Carter briefing papers — you said that they wanted the Justice Department to monitor this case. Does monitor mean that they're going to do their own investigation of it? And also, since these serious questions are being raised about people who now hold senior positions in your Administration, do you think it would be appropriate to appoint a special prosecutor rather than having your own Justice Department look into the matter?

A. That would be up to the Attorney General, with regard to appointing a special investigator. But all of my people who had any knowledge at all of this have been told that they are available to the Justice Department and I told the Justice Department they're available for any questioning they want to do.

Q. Does this mean that the Justice Department is conducting an investigation?

A. Yes, I've called it monitoring, but that's what it amounts to. I've said to find out if there was any wrongdoing and take action. Yes?

Civil Rights Record

Q. Mr. President, I'm going to look this up. A group of your supporters — black Republicans — charge that your civil rights policies suffer from a lack of substance. They cite communications as you indicated here in the last press conference. They are urging action to appoint blacks to your Administration, and they want the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, William Bradford Reynolds, fired. What are you going to do to address the concerns of your own supporters?

A. Well, I think that if there are supporters of mine who are saying those things, then I don't think they are aware of what we are doing on that particular subject and what we have done.

Q. Right now, for example, the Justice Department — school discrimination — is investigating one more case than in the same time in the Carter Administration he was investigating. But at the same time we have investigations going on in eight school districts in the country where we have suspicions of discrimination. We are also continuing cases that have been brought before we were here that are still in litigation that the Justice Department is carrying on with.

Q. I don't know where they can get anything that indicates that we're not — I know that that's the perception — a little bit like the perception — that we're about a rich man's President. Some one starts creating that perception and keeps on saying it loud enough — pretty soon they get some people believing it. But there is no merit in that at all.

Q. And the attack, for example, on my appointees to the Civil Rights Commission — well Dr. Abrams represents Luther King whom he arrested in Atlanta. Buzwell, who was eight years the President of San Jose State in California, and was 30 years in the civil rights field, and in 1974 was cited by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors for his work in civil rights.

Q. To follow — what would you call the perception problem when a group of black Republicans met with you people at the White House on May 31 to discuss these things?

A. Well, they discussed them with a number of our appointees who are already there. I would like to have and will make a visit to you. We are doing all that we can to do and maybe it'll straighten out some of the false perceptions but some persons — welcome back Anne, glad to see you back.

Rich Man's President

Q. Mr. President, even on the eve of this news conference you tax cut that you mentioned earlier, the polls continue to show that between 80 and 70 percent of the people still consider you to be a rich man's President, with no idea of what the people who aren't wealthy are going through out there and really are unfair to the poor. How does that make you feel? And what, if anything, can you do to change that perception? Are you doing any — you're doing a lot of things in your opening statement about it so I mean — you pollsters say it's a biggest problem. What do you do to change that?

A. Well, Gary, I know this has been hung on me and you asked how I felt. I've been struggling. I was raised in poverty and I remember very well what poverty is. And I remember what it was like in the Great Depression — that's one of the advantages of being my age. Now there are many of you here who've only read about it.

Q. And suggesting this unfairness thing, first of all, what is unfair to the low-income people than the double-digit inflation that we had for two years a row before we got here. A person that was only getting \$2,000 a year, in one year he was only getting — he only had \$4,000 worth of purchasing power; \$10,000 he had \$8,000 in purchasing power.

Q. The people who were getting — I remember in California, we raised the Federal aid to children, the aid to children program, we raised it three and the grants and the aid to children power that they had before we had to start making the raises. That's one thing we've done.

Q. The other thing, with all the talk about budget talks and so forth, if anyone was ever stupid what it is we've done in many of the social programs, yes, we have taken some 800,000 people off food stamps because their incomes were about 100 percent or more of the poverty level. But we have four million more people getting food stamps because we reduced more spending and \$3 billion more in spending on food stamps down to people that were below that level — at the poverty level.

Q. The same is true in many of the things, the school lunch programs, the aid to college students and so forth. We redirected it from poor to rich. We believed should've been able, had incomes that would've enabled them to not only help a child in — that they were sending to college, but they were in a market where they could afford to borrow.

Q. We redirected that down and increased what we were doing for the people that were in poverty.

Q. I only know from my own background — and someday let me give you my recipe for oatmeal meat, I thought I was helped. I was a kid. I found out my mother was saving money on meat.

Q. I just — my feeling, and it's very deep within me is this: No the rich don't need my help and I'm not doing things to help the rich. I'm doing things that I think are fair to all of the people.

Q. But what I want to see above all is that this country remain a country where someone can always get by. That's the thing that we have and that should be preserved.

Q. Now I don't know how much more I can do on this subject. I thought I had another line there for a minute that I was going to use but maybe it's just as well that I don't use it.

Budget Compromise

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Debate Material

Q. Regarding the Carter debate material obtained by your 1980 campaign organization, do you think it was right or wrong to keep this material, to use it for your advantage, and also you think it's O.K. to keep someone on your staff who did indeed handle this material?

A. Well now, Jim, to try to answer your several questions there, first of all, I never knew until you people made it public in the press a few days ago that there ever had been such material in possession of any people in our campaign organization. I never saw anything of the kind, and as I recall the debate, I don't recall any particular use that could have been made of anything of that kind because having found the papers they must have been referring to that some of our people do recall seeing. There wasn't anything of campaign strategy in those. They were the type of thing that would be in any campaign — positions that they would take on my positions, their achievements and what they thought their Administration had achieved. We probably had our side of the same kind on our side.

Q. But everything that was used in that debate had been used over and over again on the campaign trail. And I think you're right in saying that the two contestants do not set the tone of the debate or the agenda. The journalists set the agenda and the questions are the ones that determine what you're going to talk about. And unless they had some material in advance, we answered the questions that they asked.

Q. Now, the other thing is that in an effort to get at that you said about right or wrong, we have turned over everything that we have been able to find that we had to the Justice Department and here as you all I think have seen and are going to see if you haven't, almost two full pages, is everything that we could find with the time at which was turned over to the Justice Department with my request that they monitor this very carefully and if they find that there was any incidence of wrongdoing on the part of anyone in our organization — or anyone in the Carter organization — then take whatever action is appropriate.

Q. But to get to the bottom of this, because no one ever, it seems strange to me that since I was the debtor, not one of our side ever mentioned to me anything of this kind, or that they had anything to tell me any of the things that supposedly were in there.

Q. As a matter of fact, some of the things that were said there were all my own.

Q. Was it right to have this material back then at that time or should you people have followed the example known about in another case where this material came into someone's possession and was returned unopened. We don't want it, send it back. Should that have been the way this was handled or was it proper to look at this material even having received it?

A. Well, I don't know that it came in any kind of a cover or anything to do what it was. As I've said before, we asked the Justice Department to find out if there was anything improper going on or anything that was illegal in any way or any wrongdoing and take whatever action is necessary. But since I never got into the debate, what purpose did it serve?

Q. Mr. President, I think there's a lot of information that the rest of the people, I do know that after I addressed the Joint Session of Congress and the people on television on that subject, there was a decided shift in favor of our position.

Q. But then I guess that proves the power of advertising. There was a constant drumbeat ever since I made one speech but then the drumbeat, ever since to the people, is somewhat denigrating our position there.

Q. Mr. President, Jim Wright said at the White House that there are some in Congress who don't believe that this Administration wants peace in Central America. And your aides have followed the example supporting your Central American policy have gone down and the people seem to be moving away from that. And I have a follow-up. How do you account for this?

A. Well, Helen, I think there's a lot of information that the rest of the people, I do know that after I addressed the Joint Session of Congress and the people on television on that subject, there was a decided shift in favor of our position.

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Talks With Rebels

Q. Mr. President, what it is that prevents you from talking to Castro, to the Sandinistas, to the representatives of the rebels in El Salvador? I mean to at least explore negotiations? And I mean would it really harm the Salvadoran Government if you made that approach?

A. The fact is that we have our business either. The Salvadorans have appointed a peace commission that is supposed to be going on. And I think it's made contact but trying to persuade the revolutionaries — the Marxists — to come to — to come in and discuss with them how they can accept amnesty and join in the electoral democratic process that will be taking place and so far, they've been nothing but turn-down.

Q. On the other side, in Nicaragua, it is simply reversed. It is the democratic revolutionaries who've ousted the Marxists took over and created the democratic form of government. And all they want, all they want is, is to return to the principles of the revolution that overthrew Somoza — the election of human rights, a free press, all those things.

Q. It isn't a case of us not wanting to talk to them or anything that in my Administration we made contact with Mr. Castro. Nothing came of it and we haven't had much success since. Every — ah, I'll come back to it.

Q. Ethical implications. Q. Mr. President, I'd like to try that right-and-wrong question once again, just to see how you evaluate this. Do you see these questions about the Carter briefing book as important, really important, possessing ethical implications? Or is this just a matter of a highly political effort by the Democrats? One that you find you must address simply because it has political implications?

A. Godfrey, how could you think that there was anything political in this? I happen to agree with House Speaker Tip O'Neill, who said today that he didn't think the debate would have turned out any differently one way or the other and they thought the thing ought to go away and he didn't think there ought to be a Congressional investigation of the policy. I was speaking with words of profound wisdom.

Q. Just as a matter of curiosity and following — because you called Mr. Castro in and asked him what he may know about all this? Anything?

A. We've all talked about this, and we've even had a stack of papers that has gone over to the Justice Department that are available for anyone. And those papers, and anyone who has been around a campaign knows the reams of paper, the reams of proposals and plans that are laid out to you — that were passed over, and I can understand his very well not having paid any attention. He wasn't going to read a stack of papers. They didn't come in a binder or a cover or anything. And, as I say, evidently the book that is now being peddled to many of you is not what

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A. No. The stuff they had again was not what is in this final book. It was not campaign strategy. And most of everything that I've heard that they found in those papers are the positions that were already public in the campaign. They were the kind of things that I had, where staff would tell me here's a list of the things you ought to be talking about. And it was this type of thing, that if I think that Dave Stockman meant, although he can't speak for him-

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